

The Spanish State and the Muslim Brotherhood

El Estado Español y los Hermanos Musulmanes

In the 1960s, the Spanish city of Granada stood out for both the number and the caliber of its visitors. In 1963 and 1964, the Islamic Center of Granada and the Muslim Student Center of Granada were established there. Both associations were formed in 1966 and given legal character following the passage of the Associations Law (191/1964) on December 24, 1964. The management of these centers, according to Arigita and Ortega in “Los Hermanos Musulmanes en España” in *Los movimientos islámicos transnacionales y la emergencia de un “islam europeo”*, alternated among their members and often fell to members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood inspired the first legally constituted Islamic associations, a relationship that, while there are fewer sources on the subject, has historical evidence when we look at the origins of the first Muslim persons with an impact in Spain in regards to these associations.

The achievements of Arab students lay the groundwork for modern Muslim organizations in Spain. The Syrian Nizar Ahmad al-Sabbagh was the Muslim Brotherhood's first visible representative in Spain. According to the Syrian Brotherhood's official story, al-Sabbagh settled in Spain in 1967, urged by his brothers to continue his Islamic work after the 1963 coup d'état (al-'Aqil 2009).

From the mid-twentieth century to the mid-1970s, Spain served as a haven for Muslim Brotherhood members. The Syrian Nizar Ahmad al-Sabbagh proceeded to expand his activities within the Arab student community in Granada. Thus, al-Sabbagh was a founding member of the Union of Muslim Students in Spain, the first Islamic body at the national level. Al-Sabbagh was also an active participant in the Islamic student organizations of the 1970s. Indeed, Kamal Elhelbawi, former spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood in the West and director of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), an

organization committed to sponsoring the promotion of Islam around the world, recalls al-Sabbagh's visit to its offices ("Comunicación personal" 2020). In this context, al-Sabbagh was able to establish La Casa Islámica, a publishing business devoted primarily to the translation and distribution of works by Islamist scholars in Spanish (Entre los autores). Six years after the collapse of the Francoist administration, which oversaw the entry of Muslim Brotherhood members into Spain, Al-Sabbagh was slain. He was assassinated in 1981 while on his way to the Islamic Center of Barcelona, where he was khatib. There is no official narrative or agreement on the matter, while various narratives point to the Syrian government as being responsible for his death, with the Spanish government allowing the operation to occur. Thus marking the end of a period of Spain acting as a haven for the Muslim Brotherhood.



Nizar Ahmad al-Sabbagh performing a khutbah in Spain, undated (al-'Aqil 2009).

References

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Comunicación personal con Kamal Elhelbawi del Real Instituto Elcano, mayo de 2020.

Elena Arigita y Antonio Ortega (2012), “Los Hermanos Musulmanes en España”, En Frank Peter y

Rafael Ortega (coords.) Los movimientos islámicos transnacionales y la emergencia de un “islam europeo”. Barcelona: Bellaterra.

Entre los autores traducidos se encuentran Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, Abu-l-'Ala Maududi y

Hammudah Abdalati, aunque al-Sabbagh también publicó algunas obras breves propias como

«Al-Qadiani'ah (o Al-Ahmadi'ah) no es Islam», «El casamiento y el divorcio según la legislación islámica» y «La poligamia en el islam» entre otros.

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